Thinking about buying a property

By Mark Mackin, Mortgage Adviser

As with most things in life, it helps to be prepared. Buying a property, whether you already own a house or this is your first purchase, is no different. Therefore, here are my thoughts on what you should be doing from the moment you decide you'd like to buy a new home.

If you already own a property, get estate agents out early to give you an assessment on its value. It's vital to have a good idea of the value of your property, and therefore how much money you may have available to put towards a new house.

It's also important to work out your financial position. Knowing what you will get for your current house, if you are selling, gives you part of that. But regardless of whether you are selling or a first time buyer, knowing what you will need for a deposit on the new property and understanding all the costs involved is fundamental.

I'd recommend speaking to a mortgage adviser as early as you can to understand what you will be able to borrow, how much deposit you are likely to need and what the mortgage will cost on a monthly basis. They will be able to take you through what additional costs you should account for, such as legal fees and Stamp Duty. At the same time, I'd recommend contacting some solicitors to get quotes for doing the conveyancing and confirming those legal costs and Stamp Duty.

You should then be able to formulate a plan of action based on the range of property purchase prices that you can afford. It will also allow the adviser to apply for a Mortgage in Principle for you. This is where a lender will take the main details about you, your income and expenditure, carry out credit checks and provide you with an 'in principle' decision on what they would be prepared to lend to you. You will get a certificate from the lender to confirm this, and that certificate will be required by an estate agent before they will accept an offer on a property.

At this point you should be able to start looking at properties. There are plenty of online sites where you can view what is available and just start making appointments. Be open minded. You don't have to buy a property if you don't like it, but you may miss some opportunities if you narrow your search too much. Once you find a property you'd like to buy, contact the estate agent and put in an offer. I have no words of wisdom to the 'how much should I offer' question. That is one to discuss with the agent, who should have a good idea of what the seller may be willing to accept.

Once the offer is accepted, let your mortgage adviser know so they can finalise the mortgage details with you and get that applied for, and you should instruct your solicitor so that they can start to do their initial work. You will find there is a lot to do, but the earlier preparation will help.

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32 Belton Lane, Great Gonerby, NG31 8NB
01636 858551 / 07984 108067
www.monumentfs.co.uk I mark@monumentfs.co.uk